

PROLOGUE  
Project LASER

In March 1990, at a public ceremony in Washington, D.C., NASA formally launched Project LASER (Learning About Science, Engineering and Research), a program intended to help teachers improve science and mathematics education and to provide "hands-on" experiences designed to attract children to science and math studies.

The event featured the first LASER Mobile Teacher Resource Center (MTRC), a facility patterned after the highly successful Teacher Resource Rooms located at NASA field centers. The MTRC is designed to reach educators all over the nation, especially those who might be too distant from NASA centers. NASA hopes to operate several MTRCs, with funds provided by private industry.

The mobile unit is a 22-ton tractor-trailer stocked with NASA educational publications and outfitted with six work stations, each capable of servicing two teachers. Each work station has a computer providing access to NASA Spacelink, an electronic database containing a wealth of educational information. Workstations also have video recorders, allowing teachers to copy from a large library of educational videotapes, and photocopy/photographic equipment that permits teachers to copy and take home for classroom use a broad selection of lesson plans, suggested activities and slides.

The MTRC is one of five major elements within Project LASER. The others are:

- A Space Technology Course, developed by a team of teachers and NASA scientists/engi-

neers, to promote integration of space science studies with traditional courses.

- The Volunteer Databank, in which current and retired NASA employees are encouraged to volunteer as tutors, instructors, field trip guides, teacher consultants, science fair judges and other educational jobs.

- Mobile Discovery Laboratories that will carry simple laboratory equipment and computers to provide hands-on activities for students and demonstrations of classroom activities for teachers.

- The Public Library Science Program, which will present library-based science and math programs as an adjunct to classroom studies; the libraries may also host weekend, evening and summer programs with NASA-provided materials.

The prototype LASER program is being developed by Marshall Space Flight Center. The plan calls for "spinning off" the elements, as they mature, to other NASA centers, federal agencies, school systems, businesses or other sponsoring organizations. The Marshall-operated NASA Spacelink is sponsored by the NASA Educational Affairs Division; system software was developed and donated by Data General Corporation.

*Below is NASA's Mobile Teacher Resource Center. The interior view at right shows a teacher accessing the NASA Spacelink databank, which offers a broad collection of aerospace information and educational materials.*

